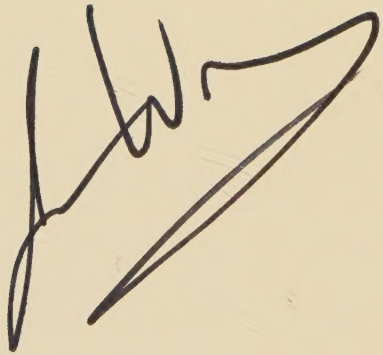
MARGARET



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MARGARET

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Eleven Records
PO Box 1101
Everett, WA 98206

I.
The Scrapbook

PATCHES

I WEAR a silken flower on my shoulder,
An orchid made of velvet and of lace,
Because a hard wind, driving through my garden,
Of its carousals left relentless trace
In broken stems and darkened leaves. This autumn
I wear a silken flower in their place.

My marble god lies broken in the garden,
But I will patch him till he looks like new,
So people will not guess that he is shattered,
A lifeless Eros made of stone and glue.
And since I've learned to patch, you needn't love me
If for a while you will pretend you do.

Margaret Rucker

City Health Dept., Everett, Wa.
Wash. State Board of Health
Bureau of Vital Statistics
REGISTER OF BIRTHS

Certified Copy of Birth Certificate

State File No. .....
Registrar's No. 129

1. PLACE OF BIRTH:

(a) County: Snohomish

(b) City or Town: Everett
(If outside city or town limits write RURAL)

(c) Name of hospital or institution: 3003 Rockefeller
(If not in hospital or institution give street number or location)

2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF MOTHER:

(a) State: Washington

(b) County: Snohomish

(c) City or Town: Everett
(If outside of town limits write RURAL)

(d) Street No. .....
(If rural give location)

3. Full name of child: MARGARET RUCKER

4. Date of birth: DECEMBER-12-1907
(Month) (Day) (Year)

5. Sex: Female

6. Twin or triplet: If so—born 1st, 2nd, or 3d

7. Number months of pregnancy:

FATHER OF CHILD

8. Full name: B. J. Rucker

9. Color or race: White

10. Age at time of this birth: 45 yrs.

11. Birthplace: Ohio
(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

12. (a) Usual occupation: Mill man

(b) Industry or business: "

13. Residence: "

21. Mother's mailing address for registration notice:

MOTHER OF CHILD

14. Full maiden name: Ruby Brown

15. Color or race: White

16. Age at time of this birth: 26 yrs.

17. Birthplace: South Dakota
(City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

18. Usual occupation: Housewife

19. Industry or business: "

20. Children born to this mother:
(a) How many other children of this mother are now living?
(b) How many other children were born alive but are now dead?
(c) How many children were born dead?

CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDING PHYSICIAN OR MIDWIFE

I HEREBY CERTIFY, That this child was born alive on the above stated date.

(Signed) W. C. Cox M. D.

or ....., Midwife

Address Everett, Washington

Filed January 6, 1908. A. P. Duryee
Registrar.

I HEREBY CERTIFY, That the foregoing is a true copy of the certificate of birth of MARGARET RUCKER as filed with the Bureau of Vital Statistics of the Health Department of City of Everett, Washington.

B. A. Fuller
Registrar.

By .....
Assistant

Everett, Wash. January 3 19 56

Everett Printing Company 3000

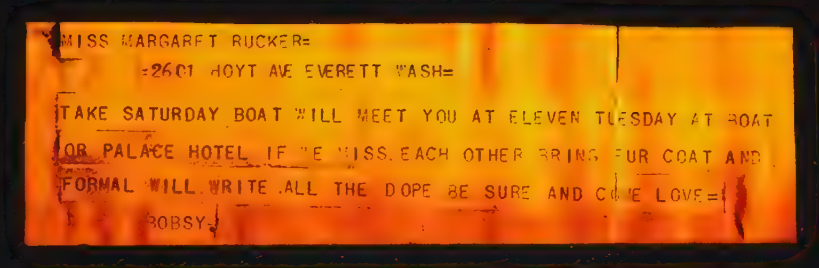
a.
Tina Batchelder
b.
Doris Brown
a.
Bridge
Doris Hyatt
Hazel Anderson

GAMMA PHI BETA

NIGHT

A WIND ripples along the leaves
Of the moon-paled aspen;
Some frightened thing slips from sight
Into a hissing forest of grasses.
Slowly from the bottom of the onyx pool
Silence uncoils,
Crushing each whisper into nothingness,
Smothering the wind.

Margaret Rucker



MISS MARGARET RUCKER=

=2601 HOYT AVE EVERETT WASH=

TAKE SATURDAY BOAT WILL MEET YOU AT ELEVEN TUESDAY AT BOAT OR PALACE HOTEL IF WE MISS EACH OTHER BRING FUR COAT AND FORMAL WILL WRITE ALL THE DOPE BE SURE AND COME LOVE=

BOBSY

WEDDING HELD IN EVERETT

Marriage of Miss Margaret Rucker to Lieut. J. Armstrong of Interest Here

OF interest to Seattle society is the wedding of Miss Margaret Rucker of Everett, former University of Washington student and member of Gamma Phi Beta Sorority, to Lieutenant Justus Rodgers Armstrong, U. S. N., son of Mr. George Rutledge Armstrong of Rogersville, Tenn. The service was read July 18 by the Rev. George T. Gunter at the Everett home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bethel J. Rucker. The drawing room was decorated with standards of midsummer flowers in shades of pink and white and lighted tapers.

The bride, given in marriage by her father, wore a close-fitting Paton model of deep powder blue Alencon linen lace, cut with natural waistline. She carried a spray of golden Ophelia rosebuds.

Mrs. Jasper Rucker was her only attendant, wearing a similarly designed model of pink eyelet organdie and carrying Briarcliffe rosebuds. Mr. Jasper Rucker was best man.

Mrs. Rucker, mother of the bride, wore deep ecru chiffon with gardenias.

Only relatives attended the ceremony and a reception for intimate friends followed. Assisting in the dining room were Mrs. Thomas MacDonald, Mrs. William H. Cleaver, Mrs. Leonard L. Crosby and Mrs. Leroy Backus of Seattle.

Mrs. Armstrong wore for traveling an imported suit of cricket green trimmed with cinnamon fox with a corsage of brown orchids. Lieutenant and Mrs. Armstrong will be at home after August 1 in San Francisco, where Lieutenant Armstrong is stationed on the U. S. S. Henderson.

STATE OF WASHINGTON
County of _____ } ss.

No. 21,380

Marriage Certificate

THIS IS TO CERTIFY, that the undersigned, a Minister

by authority of a License bearing date the 10th day of July A. D., 19 21

and issued by the Auditor of Snohomish County, did on the 10th day of July A. D., 19 21

at Everett City or Town County of Snohomish, State of Washington, join

IN LAWFUL WEDLOCK Juatus M. B. P. Armstrong

of the city of Monroeville County of _____ State of Texas

and Margaret Rucker, of the City of Everett County of

Snoqomish State of Wash. with their mutual assent, in the presence of

Jasper L. Rucker and Gertrude C. Rucker witnesses.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, witness the signatures of the parties to said ceremony, the witness and myself

this 10th day of July A. D., 19 21

WITNESS	PARTIES	OFFICIATING CLERGYMAN OR OFFICER
J. L. Rucker	J. M. B. P. Armstrong (MALE)	Geo. T. Gunter
Gertrude C. Rucker	Margaret Rucker (FEMALE)	1st Pres. Church, P. O. ADDRESS Everett WASHINGTON

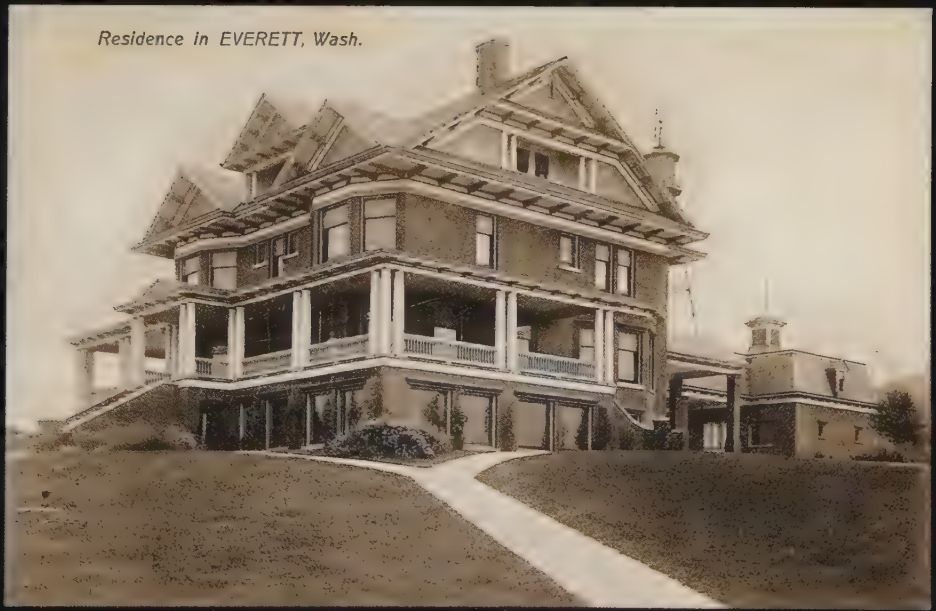
Filed July 21, 19 21

E. Walter Maynard County Clerk

I, Geo. P. Dubuque, County Clerk of Snohomish County, State of Washington, and ex-officio Clerk of the Superior Court of said County and State, the same having common law jurisdiction with a Clerk and Seal, do hereby certify that I have compared the above and foregoing copy of Marriage Certificate with the original thereof now on file and of record in my office, and that the same is a full, true and correct copy of the same, and of the whole thereof.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the said Superior Court, at Everett, this 17 day of Feb. A. D. 19 42

Geo. P. Dubuque Snohomish County Clerk. By Grace M. Hall Deputy Clerk.


Residence in EVERETT, Wash.

NAVY OFFICER'S WIFE INJURED IN COLLISION

Mrs. Margaret R. Armstrong in Critical Condition After Cars Crash.

Mrs. Margaret R. Armstrong, 25, wife of a naval officer stationed at the Naval Academy, was seriously injured in a head-on collision between two automobiles on the Bladensburg road, near Twenty-fourth place, today.

Mrs. Armstrong, who was riding with her husband, Lieut. J. M. B. R. Armstrong, 28, was removed to Casualty Hospital, where her condition was said to be serious. She is an expectant mother.

Lieut. Armstrong was cut about the legs and face. His car and a machine operated by William A. Mulligan, 42, of the 4500 block of New Hampshire avenue collided as they were going in opposite directions along the highway. Mulligan was only slightly injured and a passenger in his car, Norman Kogok, 28, a Washington automobile salesman, was slightly hurt.

A car operated by William S. Melter, 1900 block of Kearney street northeast, started to make a left turn in front of him just before the accident occurred, Mulligan told police. The naval officer's car was bound for Washington from the Academy and Mulligan and Melter were going north, it was said. Melter's car was not struck and after giving his name he left the scene.

Police said both Mulligan and Lieut. Armstrong would be taken to No. 5 precinct pending investigation of the accident.

SUNLIGHT

Floating in a cocktail glass—
Waves lap softly, thickly,
And trickle through my hair,
Bronzing its duskiness.

I wonder why
I never brush against
The crystal walls,
Nor clip off flakes of glass
To sparkle through the gold.

Perhaps now I will drown.
It would be nice to die
Sinking lazily deeper down
Into this dreamy sea
Of golden wine.

MARGARET RUCKER.

* * *

The Chemical Warfare School
United States Army

Be it known that

Lieutenant (lg) Justus M. B. E. Armstrong

United States Navy

having satisfactorily completed the subjects

enumerated on the reverse hereof, is awarded this

Certificate of Proficiency

Given at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland, this seventeenth day of June,

One thousand nine hundred and thirty-two

Thomas J. Ford,
1st Lt. C.W.S.,
Secretary

Recorded: June 17, 1932

CAPT. J.R.ARMSTRONG

THE

President of the United States of America

Expresses the sincere appreciation of his fellow-countrymen for the loyal service rendered by

[illegible] ROGERS ARMSTRONG
CAPTAIN
UNITED STATES NAVY

on active duty in the United States Navy during World War II.

In testimony whereof I am privileged to bestow this

Certificate of Satisfactory Service

Done in the City of Washington, D.C. this NINETEENTH
day of DECEMBER *Nineteen hundred and forty* SEVEN .

For the President:

John L. Sullivan
Secretary of the Navy

Wife Sees Air Executive End Life Over Coffee Cup

While he and his wife sat with their coffee in the den at their luxurious home in Burbank following dinner last night, Justus Roger Armstrong, 46, engineering director of the Bendix Aviation Corp., suddenly drew a Japanese automatic pistol from his pocket and shot himself to death.

The wife, Margaret, told Burbank police her husband had started to drink his coffee when he suddenly left the den, telling her:

"Just a moment, dear. I'll be right back."

She said he apparently went into his bedroom to get the gun with which he killed himself a few minutes later.

Armstrong had returned to the den, sat down beside his wife and was talking to her when he suddenly drew the gun, placed the muzzle in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

JUSTUS R. ARMSTRONG

Death Over a Cup of Coffee—

Armstrong Rites Today

BURBANK, April 23.—Private funeral services will be held at 11 a. m. tomorrow at the A. C. Fillbach Mortuary for Justus Roger Armstrong, 46, aircraft executive and retired rear admiral, who shot himself Friday night.

The dead man's wife, Margaret, who was with him at his home, 1100 East Sixth street, when he killed himself, said he had been worrying about the importance of his work. He was western division engineering director of the Bendix Aviation Corporation.

Possibility that Armstrong had been worrying over the chance of losing his job was discounted by company heads. R. C. Fuller, divisional general manager, said Armstrong had been highly regarded for his work on sonar and radar.

Rear Admiral Armstrong Dies in South

Word was received here last evening of the death of Rear Admiral J. R. Armstrong, retired, at the family home in Burbank, Calif. Rear Admiral Armstrong was the husband of the former Margaret Rucker and was widely known in Everett. Details were lacking.

Mrs. Armstrong's mother, Mrs. B. J. Rucker, has left to join her daughter at Burbank. Her brother, Jasper Rucker, and Mrs. Rucker are expected momentarily in from a trip to San Francisco and probably will return South.

Rear Admiral Armstrong at the time of his sudden passing, was affiliated with the Bendix Corporation at Burbank. His retirement from the armed forces followed a meritorious career in the Navy. He was a graduate of the Naval Academy at Annapolis. In addition to his wife he is survived by two sons, George and John.

TWO · DEATHS

My love left me
In April,
When the world was fresh and new;
My love left me
In the springtime,
When my heart was young and true.
Had he gone from me in summer
While I was harvesting grain;
Had I lost him in the autumn
When my heart was grey as rain;
Had he left me, old, in winter,
My heart would have known less pain —
But my love left me in April
And I shan't know love again.

ARMSTRONG. Margaret Rucker, Palm Springs, Calif., died June 18. Private memorial services at Challacombe-Fickel and Precht chapel Saturday afternoon. Inurnment, Rucker Mausoleum, Evergreen Cemetery.

Obituaries

MARGARET RUCKER ARMSTRONG

Mrs. Margaret Rucker Armstrong, Palm Springs, Calif., died at her home in Palm Springs June 18. Mrs. Armstrong was born in Everett Dec. 12, 1907. She attended the Everett schools and the University of Washington. Mrs. Armstrong leaves two sons, George Rucker Armstrong of Berkeley, Calif., and John Rogers Armstrong of Palm Springs; mother, Mrs. Ruby B. Brucker, 2624 Hoyt Ave., and one brother, Jasper L. Rucker, 1014 Hoyt Ave. Private memorial services were held for Mrs. Armstrong Saturday afternoon at the Challacombe-Fickel and Precht chapel, the Rev. M. M. Stocker of First Presbyterian Church officiating. Inurnment at the Rucker Mausoleum in Evergreen Cemetery.

There's No Such Thing As Garbage

Chicken John Rinaldi

A series of bizarre decisions created an odd ecology of circumstance that resulted in me discovering a most interesting story at the bottom of a garbage bin.

It was just sitting there, among the other contents of a house that a crew of workers had cleared out. I wasn't really interested in the garbage, per se. I needed to make some space in the dumpster, because my van was full of trash that someone paid me money to bring to the dump. I'd already spent the money on something else, and was looking for a place to relieve my royal blue Dodge Tradesman 200 of its burden. The furniture was just thrown in, wasn't packed very tightly. It could be re-packed and my stuff would fit. The furniture was actually okay. I could probably sell some of it at the flea market on Sunday. I knew a guy who sold stuff there—he let me drop off junk and gave me half of the money he made selling it.

The wind was howling, as it does on the top of a hill at three in the morning. Driving around lost, listening to Billy Idle* and looking for empty dumpsters an hour after the Chameleon closed. If I could jettison the trash, I could sleep in the van lying down instead of sitting up in the driver's seat. I have no idea how I got to Wool Street in Bernal Heights, just driving around looking for new construction sites with dumpsters. Really, I kinda had no idea how I got to San Francisco in the first place. Just lost in the world, always looking for something. Finding the queerest things, things that I never knew I was looking for until I found them.

After I unloaded all the furniture onto the sidewalk (not easy!), I was sweaty. I was already in the dumpster, so I just sat down out of the wind to light a cigarette. It was dark in there on a cloudy, moonless night, and the light from my lighter grew brighter as I sucked. I noticed a bunch of stuff on the floor of the dumpster. Drawers from a built-in. One of them had a candle in it. So I lit that can-

**Idle was the original spelling of Billy Idol's last name when he was in Generation X before he sold out, cashed in and became totally irrelevant. That tape was stuck in the tape deck and I listened to Gen X on one side and the Toy Dolls on the other side for the better part of a year before someone stole the stereo. Those songs are forever burned into my brain.*

dle, and used it to look at the stuff. Nowadays, you would have used your phone, but by that fragile candlelight, I discovered the scrapbook that started all this.

Finding that beautiful, hand-tooled leather scrapbook with that candle was a moment of divine connection. Flipping through the pages of Margaret's life by candlelight, reading her poetry, seeing her photos, lost in the world, safe for the moment with half a pack of cigarettes and the prospect of a vessel to dump some trash so I could have my van back. Crouched in a dumpster, I felt like I was the luckiest man alive.

Her poems touched me in a way that poems never had before. Especially the one called "Patches." The poem was ripped out of a real published book, the page yellow with age. The photos of her pregnant in the hospital after a car wreck, and then seeing the next page with birth announcements of her children. Yes! It was a roller coaster ride. A few pages later, there she is with her husband having dinner with FDR. It all boggled my brain. I mean, the Chemical Warfare School? Rear Admiral? All I knew was that it made me feel alive to think about it. It made me feel like I didn't know anything about life, and the world felt new again.

The scrapbook itself was of a quality I'd never before seen. Did I mention that the leather was tooled? By hand! Richly made. A family heirloom. Some family, somewhere. I wanted to find them. Give it to them. It wasn't garbage. Well, technically garbage is just an idea, and I could go on about that, but… this definitely wasn't garbage.

I offloaded my trash into the dumpster, took some of the furniture (I still have a small table), and scurried off into the night looking for a place to park and sleep that wasn't directly under a street lamp.

It was a hot August day in 2003 at the Box Shop. I was re-wiring the trailer lights in my pickup truck to lend to Lightning, so he could tow his Airstream to Burning Man. I was drinking a bottle of Vitamin Water. Someone in the shop was mixing copper sulfate with water and brushing it on copper to make that greenish patina. They were mixing it in a plastic Vitamin Water bottle. You know where this is going…

The chemical burns on my liver made me slow for the better part of a year. For a few more years, I would go through phases of slowness. Poison control didn't really know what to do with me

because there was never a case of anyone drinking copper sulfate and surviving. Somewhere in there it also came out that I had Hep C. My labs were shitty. I felt bad. The stress of a bad breakup and a biopsy showing severe scarring on my liver combined with my showman's tendency towards histrionics—I was convinced that the end was nigh.

My will was easy to make. Tools go to John Law, vehicles go to Billy the Junkman, porn goes to Jim Mason, my dog Dammit would go to Dannygirl, etc... but when it came to that scrapbook, I didn't know what to do.

By this time, I'd had the thing for ten years. The book moved with me from living in the van, to living in storage spaces, to my dad's garage, to LA when I lived in the warehouse without the boss knowing, it went on tour with the circus, I had it behind the bar at the Odeon for a while... I showed it to everyone. Carefully reading their faces and being completely unable to answer a single question when they were done. Dates, guests, performers I was hosting, people around the campfire, roommates, the plumber... they all saw the book. My line was always, "there's someone I'd like you to meet."

Of all my possessions, this was one of the most valuable. And I was afraid that when I died it would just end up in a dumpster again. Sure, people looked at it with interest. But did they really understand why it was so important, why it was such a precious thing? Did they get it? It was a real dilemma. I was convinced that I was about to keel over at any time... and I had no clue what I was supposed to do with the fucking scrapbook of Margaret Rucker.

I didn't trust any single person with it. So I decided to trust everyone.

I did what I usually do when presented with a problem—I turned it into a show. I had Jascha scan some of the photos and documents from the book and turn them into a PowerPoint presentation with Linda Robertson orating (you know, reading the poems, news clippings and stuff) because she has a great British accent. I rented 12 Galaxies, invited local musicians Faun Fables and circus starlet Baby Dee to play, and asked Miriam the aerialist to perform while I introduced the audience to Margaret. Three hundred people came out on a rainy Sunday night to hear the haunting sounds of Faun Fables and the funeral dirges of Baby Dee. Most people were confused about the "scrapbook" part of the show; they really didn't know what to make of my memorial for this total stranger. Miriam sat on her trapeze reading the newspaper as I started

talking about the van and the dumpster. She let some of the pages drop out of the newspaper into the crowd—all the pages were from the obituaries. She did some poses: feats of strength and endurance, her muscles strong and sure… I talked about garbage.

And then I showed the slideshow. They watched it, and I watched them. Curious at first, they invested. By the time they got to the telegraph tape* they were sold. I remember watching their crushed, stunned faces when they heard the details of Justus' death—the looks of betrayal, the head shaking, that confounded hands-over-the-mouth thing I thought people only did in horror movies. And I couldn't answer a single question. It was all just a giant mystery.

After the slideshow, I left the scrapbook on the front of the stage, encouraging people to take one of the photos or newspaper clippings home with them. They were reluctant at first, but the bands started playing, and slowly they started coming forward. Someone took a photo, someone took a poem. The scrapbook slowly emptied to souvenir hunters. People kept taking little pieces of Margaret away until finally everything was gone, and one guy even took away the empty leather scrapbook itself.

Sure, this gesture could be seen as a spoiled showman's dramathon, the cheap cliché that death is just a kind of letting go… but really, when is there a good time to confront death? Do you block out a couple hours on your calendar a few months out to stand in front of the mirror and try death on to see how it fits? Doing a show is the only tool I have to deal with anything. If I'm going through something, I do a show about it. Wanna change legislation? Do a show. Need a device to insult a former friend who has graduated to a vapid talking head for a pseudo-spiritual mega-corporation? Do a show. Wanna impress a girl? Take her to a formal brunch at the junkyard (Formal Brunk!) with fifty people in tuxedos and evening gowns drinking champagne and eating crumpets. Turn the problem into a show. Indeed, it seems that if everyone did this, there would be need of very few laws…

That show that night was perfect. Powerful. And I connected the idea of this precious life to the people. I felt like I did the right thing, at that time.

But I didn't scan everything in the scrapbook. Just some of it. To make for, like, a four-minute slide show. The scrapbook is now gone, as is most of that record of Margaret Rucker. Never in a million

**When in your life have you seen an actual telegraph tape? Everybody's heard of telegrams. They're in old song lyrics and movies all the time. But have you ever actually looked at one, let alone held the fragile thin paper tape in your hand? I hadn't. I'm fairly certain I never will again.*

years did I think I would ever solve the mysteries raised by that book, let alone meet someone from the Rucker family, or I would have never done that.

But at the time, I did what seemed to be absolutely right—giving her away. Piece by piece. Because sharing this story was the most generous thing I could think of to do. My relationship to the dry, cracking pages and the dust in the crevices of that leather tome was totally unique. It was something you couldn't buy at a store. But as important as that book had been to me for years, I let it go.

Some people say that I am a man of uncommon understanding.

I have with great intention and marked proclivity embraced an odd lifestyle. It's outside of traditional commerce, mostly. Sure, you can ding me for it if you want, but it was an experiment. And I think it was a good one. You see, I chose "story" as my currency instead of money. And that has made me a very rich man.

When I found Margaret's scrapbook it was like striking gold. It wasn't the only time this has happened. I once inherited A.C. Funes' collection of Hawaiian records (an archivist, with the largest collection of Hawaiian recordings probably ever), I was entrusted with the cremated remains of a man named Ulysses who along with his dying wishes was found in the trunk of a 1977 Ford Granada, and there's my collection of diaries I got buying abandoned storage lockers, or the assortment of tortured and soiled GG Allin microphones I saved from being discarded. All gold. You can see the gold in the prizes I give away at Lost Vegas, or in the piles of crap that I drag out to Lake Lodoga every year so that hundreds of people can make boats out of bullshit. I could go on and on... point is, it started with that scrapbook. Margaret was first, and to be honest, without finding her, I don't know that I would have even been able to see any of these others. I see them now. Everywhere.

And as amazing as that discovery was, there was actually something bigger and subtler that I found in that dumpster by dim candlelight while trying to shelter myself from the wind so I could light a cigarette. I found this—everything is a story. These stories abound. They surround us. They permeate us constantly. From the right perspective, every problem is an adventure. Every reaction is an opportunity for change. Any change a chance at discovery. Every discovery a wild-eyed magic trick.

Maybe you will find a story in some un-

likely place, somewhere. Or maybe you could dig through a million more dumpsters and just get kitchen scraps, junk mail, and kids' toys up to your elbows forever. Maybe.

There's a lot of gold getting tossed out all the time. I still squirm in my chair when I think about the things that get thrown away every day. Like, it literally makes me squirm to think about it. Like a squirming squirmer at a squirm-a-thon.

I mean, we are talking about garbage here. The great indefinable resource from which I've built my empire. And I've actually come to believe very strongly that there simply is no such thing as garbage. Garbage doesn't exist. This whole story is proof.

Don't believe me? OK. How about the lost and found box at the café? That stuff isn't garbage. Right? But it gets thrown away because it doesn't have an owner. Or what about a two-liter soda bottle? I mean, those are garbage, right? It's not like you can build an oceangoing vessel out of a few hundred of them and traverse the Adriatic Sea. Right? Or what if I throw this $100 bill in the wastepaper basket?

What if a precious one-of-a-kind family heirloom is thrown in a dumpster because the guy who owned it moved to San Francisco, was unmarried, died young, and was estranged or shunned by his family? What if that were true?

And what if somehow that confusing action gives a broken young man who digs through dumpsters in the small hours the metric to an aesthetic that will come to define him?

There have been dark times in my life, but I always found a way to the light again. It was dark in the years after I chugged that bottle of copper sulfate. When Chuck died. When NYC ended. And it was dark at the bottom of that dumpster. But when you live a charmed life, as I do, at these darkest moments, you always get handed a candle.

Finding this amazing artifact changed something inside me. Enough that I've now shown it to thousands and thousands of other people. Maybe it has changed some of them too. I guess that's a vindication for a lifetime spent digging around in dumpsters in the dark. Because if you can find this fascinating reliquary in the bottom of a dumpster, then anything is possible. And because making a show out of a life tossed in a garbage bin is my way of shedding light on dark things.

You never know when a defining moment of your life is happening. In the dark, it's hard to tell the junk from the gold.

But when you find a candle, light it.

ORIGINAL
TALKING
ALL OUTDOORS

II.
The Songs

LARK OF MY HEART

Words and music by Eliza Rickman

Lark of my heart, dance in the dark and say you love me.
Lark of my heart, right from the start and say you love me.
Lark of my heart, take back the night and say you want me.
Lark of my heart, turn up the light and say we can be
The same, same, same, same,

I can see it in your eyes, I can smell it in your lies,
You know I want you.
And I can hear it in your sighs, I can feel it in your lines,
You know I want you. I know, know, know, know,
I can see it in your face, on every marble place,
You know I want you.
And I can feel in your grace, in every golden trace,
You know I want you.

What can I do? Oh boy your mood creates the weather.
What can I do? Oh how I miss the sound of thunder.
What can I do? Roll down around and lift your finger.
What can I do? Give me your hand, it's now or never,
Today, today, today, today.

MAKER OF MY SORROW

Words and music by Eliza Rickman

A good man is hard to find,
What's his is yours and mine to throw.
He had an angry head,
He had a heavy heart to hold.

Poisoning the spring with an orchid
in his hand,
And a shadow on his thumb.
In the barrel of a gun,
Me, I will find my love.

Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh,
Lord knows, where did he go?
Keeper of my heart's joy,
Maker of my sorrow.

A good man is hard to find,
God knows how I have tried repose.
Give me my aching head,
Give me my broken heart and cold.

Woman cannot hold with a diamond
on my hand,
And the water on my tongue.
In the barrel of a gun,
Me, I resign my love.

Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh,
Lord knows, where did he go?
Keeper of my heart's joy,
Maker of my sorrow,
Dealer of my heavy hand,
Healer of my wounded heart.
Lord knows, where did he go?
Lord knows, where did he go?
Lord knows, where did he go?

SHENANDOAH
DAVIS
YAMAHA

SONNET

Music by Shenandoah Davis
Text by Margaret Rucker

I see you riding on a wooden horse,
Painted bright blue with flying tail and mane,
That trots stifflegged on a sawdust course
Of circuses, balloons, an endless train
Of childish things. And now with rumpled hair,
Your clumsy hands, your boyish games to play,
Your world has still not held a thought of care:
Your wooden horse still gallops on its way.

Do you remember one time long ago
You took my doll to play with, but instead
You dropped it and you broke its china head?
Oh I am wiser now; I've learned to know
It isn't love you're asking to take;
You only want another toy to break.

SPRING AND FALL

Music by Shenandoah Davis
Text by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Margaret, are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves, like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?

Ah! as the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.

Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrow's springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:

It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

MTS. & TUNNELS

DEAR MARGARET

Words and music by Sarah Schmidt and Chris Poage

There's enough rum runners and scofflaws
to drown you,
It's a wonder how, how I found you.

My dear, my dear Margaret,
I hope that my transmission finds you well.
I'm leaving from the base here on Saturday,
Meet you at the Palace Hotel.

Wear your fur coat,
Formal on the late boat.
It's been such a long time,
I can't believe you're still mine.
I'll be counting down the days.

One, two, three days away,
Three days away on the blackball line.

My dear, my dear,
My heart grew faint upon your call.
Surrounded by a crowd of affection,
You know I will gladly trade it all.

I'm in a dream now,
I hope you hear me somehow.
It's been such a long time,
I can't believe you're still mine.
I'll be counting down the days.

One, two, two days to go,
Two days to go on the blackball line.

There's enough rum runners and scofflaws
to drown you,
It's a wonder how, how I found you.

Wear your fur coat,
Formal on the late boat.
It's been such a long time,
I can't believe you're still mine.
I'll be counting down the days.

Three, two, one day left,
One day left on the blackball line.

NIGHT

Music by Jherek Bischoff
Text by Margaret Rucker

A wind ripples along the leaves
Of the moon-paled aspen;
Some frightened thing slips from sight
Into a hissing forest of grasses.
Slowly from the bottom of the onyx pool
Silence uncoils,
Crushing each whisper into nothingness,
Smothering the wind.

JHEREK
BISCHOFF

LED TO SEA

PATCHES

Music by Alex Guy
Text by Margaret Rucker

I wear a silken flower on my shoulder,
An orchid made of velvet and of lace,
Because a hard wind, driving through my garden,
Of its carousals left relentless trace
In broken stems and darkened leaves. This autumn
I wear a silken flower in their place.

My marble god lies broken in the garden,
But I will patch him till he looks like new,
So people will not guess that he is shattered,
A lifeless Eros made of stone and glue.
And since I've learned to patch, you needn't love me
If for a while you will pretend you do.

OLD HAUNTS

Words and music by Alex Guy

Raise my flag to the east and wait for you.
All's been said, there's nothing else for me to do.
But I will watch for, I watch for you.

Time slows down in my imagined state of grace.
You ascend to that unreachable place,
But I still wait for, I still watch for you.

Our friends move on with their busy,
fruitful lives,
Practical, knowing everything must die.
But I will watch for, I will watch over you.
I still watch for you.

LONESOME LEASH

FIRST DAY

Words and music by Walt McClements

On the first day
You sailed this sea,
The waves, they crested
So tall and free.

Cresting like fire
With no smoke,
I heard your voice
Before the silence broke.

Heart beat like thunder
With no light,
Like horses gallop to war
Just beyond our sight.

Pleased to meet you,
And if I might,
I would like to spend my life
In your eye's light.
And pleased to meet you,
And if I may,
I'd like to be with you
Till my last day,
Till my last day.

FIREFLY

Words and music by Walt McClements

Margaret had a garden full of fireflies,
She herded them at dusk and dawn
before the sun or moon rise.
They danced with her like children dance,
Like drunken angels flicking lanterns at the sky.

Till one day a hard wind drove through
And winter stayed, yes, winter stayed.
The fireflies, they looked askance,
They asked of her, they asked of her,
What had gone askew with the man who always,
always hid from view.

She sighed to them a well-worn sigh
and they limned her with light.
The thing, she said, about the man who strays
from sight.
Well I love him so and he loves me, but his soul's
grown tangled and far from free.
His mind's been poisoned by man's war.
He forgot what his body's for.

The fireflies swarmed amongst themselves
And made a terrifying swell,
They said to Margaret, they might could help
To dull the pain, the pain to quell.
'Cause we know of another world,
Where your love could wait
Painless and timeless for thee.

Margaret sighed her well-worn sigh,
Said that could be best.
She walked upstairs with a comet tail of fireflies,
Into the room where Justus lies.
She made the coffee, took his hand,
Said I'll see soon in other lands,
For you needn't love this world so full of pain,
If but for a while you pretend you do.

The flicking lights, they came as one,
And covered him in their soft glow and hum.
They pulled the light right out of him and raised it
to the sky.
He looked down upon, where Margaret alone lie.
He said I spent my last breath in the light,
in the light of your eyes.
And I needn't love this world so full of pain,
For such a long while, I pretended to.

ZAC PENNINGTON

POSSESSION SOUND

Words and music by Zac Pennington

Soak up the blood from the carpet,
Wash what's left of his head.
But who's gonna tend to you Margaret,
Now that your husband's dead?

Gather his hair for your locket,
Sons in their trundle bed.
He took his gun from his pocket,
And saw to himself instead.

Fare thee well, fare thee well, my angel.
Fare thee well, they can't hurt you now.
Just rest your head
From whence we were wed,
In sweet Possession Sound.

Send my regards to my father.
Goodnight to George and John.
We're meant to care for each other,
Until the great beyond.

And high as I held you above me,
As sure as my words were true,
I know that you've never loved me,
But still you pretended to.

Fare thee well, fare thee well, my angel.
Fare thee well, they can't hurt you now.
We'll rest your head
From whence we were wed,
In sweet Possession Sound.

The rites were read and Justus is dead,
In sweet Possession Sound.

JASON
WEBLEY

PYRAMID

Words and music by Jason Webley

Tell me Margaret, what is coming down this river?
You've been watching so much longer now than I.
Do you know Margaret, just what will this day deliver,
Does it work out tooth for tooth and eye for eye?

They started stacking up the stones the very day that you were born.
No matter how you grew, they would tower above you.
You could change your name, move all the way to sunny California.
But when you start your life anew, does that long shadow follow you?

Who was it Margaret, that chose to resurrect you here for me, in scattered lines of poetry,
This distant, wistful girl I see reflected in your eyes?
Forgive me Margaret, all the ways I am mistaken, all the liberties I've taken,
I've projected you in costumes I don't think were quite your size.

Now here I'm climbing up these stones a hundred years from where you were born,
Looking for a song that could take me to you.
I have traced these roads, drove past your home in Burbank, California,
But you were not inside—you've found a better place to hide.

And tell me Margaret, when I'm gone, what will I want,
To be left at the bottom of a garbage bin, or dusted off and pulled up onto stage?
Will it please me when someone lights a candle and says my name?
Will I say—leave me in my pyramid, blow out the flame and close the lid,
This story's done, why don't we turn the page?

MY LOVE LEFT ME IN APRIL

Music by Jason Webley
Text by Margaret Rucker

My love left me
In April,
  When the world was fresh and new;
My love left me
In the springtime,
  When my heart was young and true.
Had he gone from me in summer
  While I was harvesting grain;
Had I lost him in the autumn
  When my heart was grey as rain;
Had he left me, old, in winter,
  My heart would have known less pain—
But my love left me in April
  And I shan't know love again.

EYES OF MARGARET

Words and music by John Morris Rankin

When morning comes to me,
I see the eyes of Margaret.
I see the eyes of Margaret,
When morning comes around.

And when she comes near me,
I see the eyes of Margaret.
I see the smiles of Margaret,
And time rolls around.

When darkness comes near her, and I see a sign,
The pen and the letter have faded and died.
A promise is broken, a change in the tide,
Someone is singing her song.

And when she is lonely,
I'll take the hand of Margaret.
I'll hold the hand of Margaret,
And she'll come around.

And when she is troubled,
I'll hear the cries of Margaret.
I'll dry the eyes of Margaret,
And time rolls around.

Once Upon a Pyramid

Jason Webley

"So what's the deal with Rucker? Who are the Ruckers?"

I had been dragging Amanda around Everett all day, running errands and visiting people. We had just been to see my friend Sarah Schmidt who lives up on Rucker Hill, and someone must have mentioned the Rucker Mansion, because later—when we drove down the hill and pulled onto Rucker Avenue—Amanda turned and asked who exactly these Ruckers were.

I've lived in Everett for more than ten years and grew up in a small town just a few miles away. I had certainly noticed the name but I'd never really given it any thought. Rucker was just one of those names you always saw everywhere. Wasn't there a Rucker Avenue in every city?

"I don't know," I said, "but do you want to see something pretty cool?"

The hundred-acre Evergreen Cemetery occupies the hill south of downtown and contains the graves of most of Everett's pioneers (as well as a good number of those who have lived there since). It has all of the things you want from an old cemetery—lots of illegible, timeworn gravestones, serpentine paths that make the place seem endless, and grounds that are, for the most part, unguarded at night. A few years ago, Evergreen Cemetery was bought up by a massive funeral home conglomerate called Dignity®. A big sign at the entrance reminds you of this fact, which is why I like to avoid the main entrance.

I pulled off the road and onto the grass by the old lychgate, the original entry into the cemetery a century ago. I led Amanda through the gate, past crumbling grave markers, and up the hill. It wasn't until we neared the top that she noticed it.

"Whoa."

At the apex of the hill sits a massive stone step pyramid, more than thirty feet tall and constructed from huge granite blocks, mossy and darkly stained by time. Stark, unadorned, and ominous, it looks like something that should be rising out of the jungles of Guatemala, not sitting in a cemetery in a mid-size American town.

Across the entrance to the crypt in big block letters is the name "RUCKER."

Rucker's tomb is somewhat legendary in Everett. Climbing it is a sort of rite of passage for high school kids, who also go there at night to drink and smoke pot. It's a popular hangout spot on Halloween—there are whispers about ghosts.

"Can we climb it?"

"Sure, but it's scary up there."

"It doesn't look so bad," Amanda said, as she started making her way up.

I hate climbing Rucker's tomb. It's easy enough to ascend—each step is about two feet tall and less than a foot wide. You just grab onto the next step and pull yourself up. But once you've gone about two-thirds of the way, the realization dawns that if you were to slip, there would be no way to stop yourself. My vertigo kicks in about then. With each additional step, my uneasiness quadruples, until my fingers touch the final block and the idea of pulling myself up those last twenty-four inches pretty much makes me nauseous. I usually hang there for about thirty seconds before I shakily start lowering myself back down, block by block. After a few of these big steps my leg invariably cramps up—a phenomenon I call "Rucker's Curse."

By the time we reached the top, the wind was blowing pretty good. We were both panting and clinging to the capstone, not really letting our eyes wander back towards the ground.

"You're right. It's terrifying up here. Let's get down."

The next day we both flew to San Francisco to take part in a concert—a birthday celebration for a musician we both admire. When I'm in San Francisco, I usually stay with my friend Chicken John.

I met Chicken in September of 2001. It was my first time playing in San Francisco and I had been booked at a place called the Odeon Bar in the Mission District. I showed up way too early and the place was pretty much deserted. This guy came up, introduced himself as "Chicken," and started talking.

I'm sure I must have said something that afternoon, but my memory is of an hours-long monologue with Chicken jumping from subject to subject too quickly for me to ever interject, let alone stop and think, "why is this guy telling me all of this?" He talked about the time he ran a circus, about being the guitarist in an infamous band

called the Murder Junkies, about how he once was the roadie for every band in New York City. He laid out curbstoning scams for selling cars, expounded on methods to teach new tricks to old dogs, and explained the intricacies of the market for vintage Dodge Dart parts. He also gave microlectures on welding, tantric sex, Dadaist performance art, and the inner politics of Burning Man.

Did I mention that he owned the place?

Over the years, Chicken John has become one of my favorite people out there. I mean, I have a lot of favorite people, but Chicken is in a rare category. He's someone who consistently makes wonderfully improbable things happen—sometimes small, but quite often on a grand scale. If I know that Chicken is driving, I like to come along for the ride whenever I can. I might not always get to say much, but I know the ride is going to be interesting. Whether he's running a bar or running for mayor, he's the hub of a very important wheel in the San Francisco arts community. It's a pretty weird-looking wheel—the spokes are all different lengths and made of different kinds of junk—but somehow it rolls along remarkably well and takes you to places few others seem to be trying to go.

So anyway, I was down in San Francisco for that gig with Amanda, and I was walking down the street with Chicken and his wife. I hadn't seen them in a while, and we were catching up about what we'd each been up to. A lot had happened. Chicken was now married and had a baby girl on the way. He was even living in a real house. My world had changed a lot, too. At the end of 2011—after fifteen years of touring around the planet, performing everywhere from Albuquerque to Novosibirsk—I had put my accordion down and announced that I was taking a break, perhaps a permanent one.

I told Chicken how I was filling my days, fixing up an old house in Everett. But when I said the name of my town, Chicken stopped walking. He just sort of stood there, unable to speak for a few seconds.

"Wait. Everett? You live in… Everett?"

He really seemed beside himself. Everett doesn't usually have this effect on people.

"Come with me," he said. "There's someone I want you to meet."

On our way back to his house he told me the story—how he had found this old scrapbook in a dumpster, how he'd kept it for years, and how he didn't have it anymore because he'd let a bunch of strangers take all the pages home after a show.

We went inside, Chicken got out his computer, and he showed me a slideshow he had made

from that scrapbook. It was fascinating—a cradle-to-grave account of some woman's life. She was a poet, she was beautiful, and there she was—captured in weathered newsprint and sepia photographs.

And, sure enough, the woman had been born in Everett, Washington. She was from my hometown. But it was something else that really got my attention—the woman's name was Margaret Rucker.

I didn't say anything right away. This had to be a different Rucker, right? My life is often a steady stream of unlikely coincidences, crazy triple backflips of synchronicity—but somehow this one seemed a bit too much. I kept quiet and went on watching the slideshow.

Born in 1907 to an apparently wealthy family, Margaret Rucker grew up in Everett (like me), went to the University of Washington (like I did), and married a military man (I don't recall ever doing that). They moved around and eventually ended up in California. But their lives took several dark turns—a car crash, a fatal gunshot—and this darkness was echoed in the verses she wrote. I was surprised to see that this poetry was actually quite good. One line stuck out, reached between my ribs, and tugged at my aorta:

"...you needn't love me
If for a while you will pretend you do."

This whole time, I was still wondering—could this woman be one of *those* Ruckers? Was she one of the people from the pyramid—the family that half of Everett is named after?

The final image was Margaret's obituary, and the last sentence answered my question: "inurnment at the Rucker Mausoleum in Evergreen Cemetery."

"Chicken," I said. "I was standing on top of this woman's grave just thirty-six hours ago."

In terms of white man's history, the Pacific Northwest is a pretty young place. In 1792, a guy named George Vancouver sailed around naming things most of the names we use today—Puget Sound, Mount Rainier, Whidbey Island. When he got to the little peninsula between the Puget Sound and the mouth of the Snohomish River, the place had long been the winter village of the Snohomish people. They called it Hibulb. Vancouver decided to name it Port Gardner.

About a hundred years later, two brothers, Bethel and Wyatt Rucker, moved out west from

Ohio with their mother Jane. They liked the looks of the little peninsula by the river and settled there in 1889, the same year that Washington became a state. In the century that had passed since Vancouver's visit, the peninsula had been clear cut by loggers and most of the native population had been killed off by European germs. There really wasn't much there—the modest settlements of maybe a dozen people. The Ruckers, while not incredibly wealthy, were able to purchase most of the land quite cheaply. They began plans for a modest township and filed a plat for a town that would be called Port Gardner.

But close at their heels came a group of investors representing big financial interests back east. John D. Rockefeller, in particular, had taken a fancy to Port Gardner because of strong indications that the Great Northern Railway, then being built across the country, would find its western terminus there.

Conscious that these newcomers had far greater resources, the Rucker brothers withdrew their plat and ceded much of their land to Rockefeller's minions and their plans to build a big city. The new town took the name of the fifteen-year-old son of one of those investors. (Everett Colby would set foot in the city named for him only once in his life.)

Things moved fast. Money and men came flooding in, and the city grew up almost overnight. A grid of streets forming commercial and residential districts appeared, along with banks, storefronts, mills, a smelter, and even an electric streetcar. The population rose to over 5,000 by the time Everett was incorporated as a city in May of 1893—only four years after the Ruckers had arrived. Everett was an actual boomtown.

But the crash came even faster. In 1894, it was announced that the Great Northern would actually continue to another young city twenty-five miles to the south—a little town by the name of Seattle. Panic struck. Rockefeller divested as quickly as he could. All of that money immediately drained out of the city, and with it went the men for whom most of the streets had been named.

Everyone except the Ruckers. The brothers stuck around and remained key players in Everett's development. Their main line of work was as mill men, but they also owned a hotel, ran a bank, and operated the rail line to the nearby mining town of Monte Cristo. The brothers viewed themselves primarily as businessmen. They weren't politicians or involved in public affairs, so their names were rarely in the newspapers. Actually, there really aren't

many records about Bethel and Wyatt Rucker at all, and only a couple of photographs survive. They had more or less founded Everett and helped hold it together through the panic, but they stayed out of the limelight, never really drawing attention to themselves.

The one big exception was the family mausoleum: the gargantuan pyramid on the hill. It isn't just unlike anything else in Everett—there probably isn't another private memorial quite like it anywhere in the country. It took years to complete and cost more than $30,000, which was a fortune at the time. Special granite was shipped all the way from Maine to build the mausoleum's door. The inscription on that door reads "Jane Morris Rucker. Died November 10, 1907. The pioneer of Everett. The perfect mother. The soul of honor." Though they would eventually be buried there, too, Bethel and Wyatt's names are nowhere to be seen. They built that crazy monument for their mother.

Wyatt Rucker never married. Bethel married a young woman named Ruby Brown and they had two children, Jasper and Margaret. Margaret Rucker was born on December 12th, 1907—just about a month after her grandmother Jane had died.

Construction of the pyramid began that same December.

I imagined what it must have been like growing up in a town where everything around you bore your name, and where they started building the giant crypt where you would eventually be entombed at the same moment you were born.

These thoughts stuck in my head like the hook of a song.

When I got back from San Francisco, I told the story of the scrapbook to anybody who would listen—friends and family, people around Everett. When I would get to the part where Chicken showed me the slideshow, I'd pull out my computer and show them the images. It was addictive, watching their reactions. I remember showing Jherek Bischoff when he was home between tours and we were walking around Seattle.

"It's so epic. The whole thing sounds like an opera or something. I could totally see making this into some kind of musical."

Others had made similar suggestions. *Margaret Rucker: The Musical* didn't seem like quite the right thing, but maybe we could do something else. There's an ongoing project called the Bushwick Book Club, where groups of songwriters in differ-

ent cities write songs inspired by the same book and then put on a concert of the results. Perhaps something like this could be done with Margaret's scrapbook? People could write songs inspired by her story, and we could put on a little show in Everett.

So I started asking a few of my favorite songwriters if they might be interested. First I asked Jherek and violist Alex Guy, because I've worked with them for years and I trust their taste more than anyone's. I asked Walt McClements, Eliza Rickman, and Shenandoah Davis because they are all brilliant songwriters whose work feels connected to things long past. Zac Pennington from the band Parenthetical Girls was an obvious choice since he had actually grown up in Everett. And I asked Sarah Schmidt if her group Mts. & Tunnels would be interested, since she was also a great songwriter from Everett—and it was that visit to her house on Rucker Hill that had, in a way, been the start of this whole thing.

Everybody said yes. I didn't really expect that *everyone* would say yes. This was kind of a problem, since there were now way too many acts for any normal kind of concert. But I figured we would make it work somehow. I booked the Historic Everett Theatre, a beautiful 900-seat venue that was built just a few years before Margaret Rucker was born (and now the only old performance space left in Everett).

Then I started doing a bit of research. I was actually scared to find out more specifics about Margaret. Part of what made her so fascinating was how little we knew—there were so many blanks in the story that your imagination had to fill in. All we had were those thirty-five images that Chicken had scanned. Our only insights into who she was came from this tiny slice of her story, a handful of her poems, and whatever we might discover in her eyes in those few photos. Would finding out the whole story destroy the enigma?

It turned out there wasn't much risk of that. I spoke with David Dilgard, Everett's resident historian, who knows the city's story like no one else. He was quite surprised by the images from the scrapbook, since he had never found much about Bethel Rucker's daughter beyond her name. I was unable to locate her sons, George and John Armstrong, because their names were too common and I didn't know when they were born. I did meet with Margaret's nephew, Bill, her closest surviving relative in Everett. He remembered her and was able to share some memories, but he had fallen out of touch with that side of the family decades before. He didn't have any photos or any more of her poems.

Digging around in the University of Washington libraries, I was able to find a couple yearbook photos and some sorority pictures. But the only interesting discovery came via a pencilled note on one of the pages from the scrapbook; the name of a book published in 1927. I looked up the name—it existed! The library had a copy, but I had to wait a day while the book was excavated from the archives. When I returned, I was handed a slim hardbound volume; *University of Washington Poems, Third Series*. Three of Margaret's poems appeared in that book of student verse—"Patches" and "Night," which I knew from the scrapbook, and a third poem I hadn't seen before, "Sonnet."

But that was about it.

A few weeks later, I had some business in Los Angeles, so I drove up to Burbank and parked in front of Margaret's old house—the house where her husband Justus' horrible death had occurred. It was easy to find—the address was printed right there in one of the newspaper articles Chicken had scanned about the incident. It didn't look at all like the "luxurious home" described in the clipping. It was just another normal house, not much different from the thousands of others all around it.

As the day of the concert got closer, I started having doubts. Was any of this really a good idea? Would everyone's songs be any good? Would mine? And were people really going to come see a show all the way out in Everett? Besides, hadn't I told the world pretty loudly that I was taking a break from performing? What the hell was I doing?

But mostly, I kept wondering whether this concert was really the ethical thing to do. What right did I have to raid this family's history and wave it around on stage? What would Margaret Rucker think about this attention? Was her ghost looking down on all of this with disgust?

But I didn't apply the brakes, and just as quickly as you can think up a cliché about how fast something happened, it was April 11th: the day of the show.

We actually managed to sell out the old theater. I remember walking through the crowd—it was so great to see the often-neglected venue looking so alive. There were grey-haired grandparents, gutterpunk kids, people who were curious about what I'd been up to, and others who were just drawn in by the connection to local history.

Chicken John had flown up from San Francisco. He told the story of finding the book in the dumpster, and over the course of the evening, he

showed parts of his slideshow in between the musical acts.

And the music was so good! The songs were more beautiful and heartbreaking than I could have hoped. Margaret had inspired the songwriters to write some of their best material, and I was hearing most of it for the first time, right along with the audience. Some of the songs were completely original. Others made use of the verses Margaret had left behind. Shenandoah performed a setting of the poem I'd dug out of the library. She also sculpted a song from another, even older poem, the uncannily apt "Spring and Fall" by Gerard Manley Hopkins. I was nearly in tears when Zac sang a gut-wrenching but beautiful piece about the aftermath of Justus' death. That song, as well as two others, made use of the line that had such a strong effect on me—"... you needn't love me/If for a while you will pretend you do."

When the concert was over, we passed out hundreds of candles, and most of the crowd made the two-mile pilgrimage to Evergreen Cemetery. We entered through the lychgate. From there, paper lanterns illuminated a path leading up the hill. People filtered toward the pyramid, which was all lit up with candles—the austere structure suddenly magical and inviting.

People began to climb up. Lots of them. I suppose I should have anticipated that, but I hadn't really. I wanted to yell for them to stop—what if someone fell? What if a bunch of people fell? But I couldn't speak. Everyone was so respectful and silent. I couldn't break that spell.

Even the police were quiet when they showed up. They just watched us from a distance. What were they going to say to several hundred people holding candles and silently meditating around a pyramid? Nobody fell. Nobody was hurt. I don't think anyone even got a cramp on the way down. We all just sat there together for a while until we were ready to peacefully make our way out of the cemetery.

After the concert, the e-mails started coming. Had we made a recording of the night? When would I be releasing the songs? Some people just wanted to know more about Margaret. Did she keep writing? What had become of her children? But I didn't have any answers. I had already shared everything I knew.

I still had my own questions kicking around—what had really happened in that house in Burbank over a cup of coffee? There are three

newspaper clippings about the suicide, and each of them presents a different version of the story.

And who had actually made the scrapbook? One photo shows a group of children, and a child's handwriting indicates that one of them is "me." Did Margaret herself put the book together, starting when she was a little girl? If so, why would she include photos of herself in the hospital after the car wreck or newspaper articles about her husband's suicide? If Margaret made the scrapbook, who placed her obituary on the last page? And how did the book finally end up in that dumpster?

An e-mail from Everett history buff Jack O'Donnell brought me closer to some answers. After the concert, Jack sent me a newspaper clipping mentioning Margaret's return to Everett with her infant son John. It said that John had been born on May 17th, and that her other son, George, was eleven at the time. The article was dated May 27, 1944. Now there were some dates to work with.

I still haven't been able to locate George, the child Margaret was carrying when she was in the car accident. He would be in his eighties now, if he's still alive.

But I did find his younger brother. John Rogers Armstrong passed away in June of 1993. He was just 49 and according to his death certificate, the cause of death was Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. He had been living in the Castro District of San Francisco—just a few blocks (and a few months) away from where Chicken John would find a worn leather scrapbook at the bottom of a dumpster.

John would have been just five when his father shot himself, and fifteen when his mother died.

When I requested John's death certificate from the California Department of Health, I also ordered a copy of Margaret's. Her obituary says nothing about how she died, and I hoped to perhaps learn something about what had happened to her.

According to the death certificate, Margaret Rucker died on June 18th, 1959. The cause of death was acute barbiturate poisoning from an overdose of sleeping pills.

I've told Margaret's story so many times now, trying to capture some aspect of this woman who wrote such bleak and beautiful lines and then went on to such a dark end. Every time, the story changes shape a bit—with different emphases and omissions. A few times, when I've needed to con-

jure a brief description, I've said that when Chicken found the book he "fell in love" with her. And that I had in turn also fallen in love.

But that felt like a bit of a lie. Did I really love Margaret Rucker?

When I share her story, some people seem to relate to her instantly. They make statements about what she must have been thinking in a certain photo, what kind of person she was. But somehow I was never quite able to speculate like that. I was entranced by her mystery and seduced by the magical way she had entered my life, but Margaret herself always remained distant somehow. I never really felt like I found her, like I knew her. And as the project evolved, I felt guilty about this.

I mentioned this conundrum to Chicken on the phone the other day, and his response was quick.

"Love her? I'm not even sure I *like* her," he said. "But I guess it's like she's family. You know? The way she came into our lives, we didn't really have a choice. It's like she's an aunt or something—crazy aunt Maggie. So if you look at it like that—sure, I love her!"

I suppose that he's right. Maybe I don't have a choice about whether or not I love Margaret Rucker. And besides, hadn't she herself told me from the outset that it didn't matter, so long as I pretended to? But one thing I am certain of—I am in love with her *story*. I love it for its unanswered questions, its poetic symmetry, and for the crazy serendipitous way it's become interwoven with my own story. I love all of these songs that my friends have written, which are now also a part of that story. And I love the way this project has brought me closer to my friend Chicken and made me feel genuinely connected to the place where I live.

When I think about it, Margaret showed up in my life with pretty marvelous timing. Not because I suddenly had an amazing answer to Amanda's question, "Who are the Ruckers?" But because whether I knew it or not, I had been looking for something. I was lost, and I needed a map. If Chicken had handed me that book ten years earlier, I would have thought it was pretty cool, but that's about it. I would have been too caught up in my own world to see anything more. But by last year, I was a different guy—a bit tired of myself and looking for somewhere to devote my skills and energy. And there she was, swept in on a certified whirlwind of serendipity—my muse.

I look around this town that Margaret and I share, and I see how rapidly things change. How quickly a wealthy family can disappear into obscu-

rity, how fast a fortune can evaporate. There really isn't much left in Everett that was standing a hundred years ago. And this makes me think about even longer stretches of time. I wonder what I might have touched in my life that could be worth anything to anyone in, say, a thousand years. Our money, our machinery, our roads, and structures—all of that will be long gone. The only commodities that I can imagine having any chance of retaining value over that kind of time are our myths and stories.

Margaret's story could have ended so many times. The scrapbook could have so easily stayed in the bottom of that dumpster and just ended up in a landfill. And even after it was rescued, Chicken might have never shown it to someone who would make the connection with the Rucker name in Everett.

But her story didn't end. It just kept miraculously unfolding. And hopefully it will continue to unfold. This collection of images and songs will now be making its way to bookshelves, libraries, and eventually thousands of dumpsters around the world.

I really hope that Margaret's story will be useful to those who find her. It's been very helpful for me. Margaret helped me find my way again—helped me realign my wheels and figure out what I want make of the rest of my days on this big marvelous ball of dirt.

What exactly am I hoping to leave behind? A big pile of money? A giant house? The biggest tombstone in the graveyard? If some trace of my consciousness survives beyond this life, would it even care if there were a bunch of buildings, streets, or cities named after me?

I don't think so.

I think I'd be happy just knowing I had been part of a good story.

Album Credits

"Lark of My Heart"
Words and music by Eliza Rickman
Vocals/autoharp: Eliza Rickman
Viola/violin: Alex Guy
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Drums: Paul Kikuchi
Bass: Jherek Bischoff
Recorded and mixed by Jason Webley

"Spring and Fall"
Music by Shenandoah Davis
Text by Gerard Manley Hopkins
Piano/vocals: Shenandoah Davis
Viola/violin: Alex Guy
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Recorded by Doug Haire at Jack Straw Productions in Seattle, WA
Mixed by Jason Webley

"Old Haunts"
Words and music by Alex Guy
Vocals/viola/violin: Alex Guy
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Recorded and mixed by Alex Guy

"Dear Margaret"
Words and music by Sarah Schmidt and Chris Poage
Guitar/vocals: Chris Poage
Guitar/vocals: Sarah Schmidt
Recorded and mixed by Jason Webley

"Night"
Music by Jherek Bischoff
Text by Margaret Rucker
Vocals/bass/ukulele/electronics: Jherek Bischoff
Violin: Serena McKinney
Cello: Christopher Votek
Recorded and mixed by Jherek Bischoff

"Sonnet"
Music by Shenandoah Davis
Text by Margaret Rucker
Piano/vocals: Shenandoah Davis
Recorded by Doug Haire at Jack Straw Productions, Seattle.
Mixed by Jason Webley

"Patches"
Music by Alex Guy
Text by Margaret Rucker
Vocals/viola/violin: Alex Guy
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Piano: Curt Sydnor
Recorded and mixed by Alex Guy
Additional mixing by Jason Webley

"Maker of My Sorrow"
Words and music by Eliza Rickman
Vocals/percussion: Eliza Rickman
Guitarrón/noises: Jason Webley
Recorded and mixed by Jason Webley

"First Day" and "Firefly"
Words and music by Walt McClements
Accordion/vocals/trumpet/drums: Walt McClements
Recorded and mixed by Theo Karon at Kingsize Studio, Los Angeles

"Possession Sound"
Words and music by Zac Pennington
Vocals: Zac Pennington
Viola/violin: Alex Guy
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Bass/electronics: Jherek Bischoff
Drums: Paul Kikuchi
Recorded and mixed by Jason Webley

"Pyramid"
Words and music by Jason Webley
Vocals/guitar/piano: Jason Webley
Bass: Jherek Bischoff
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Viola: Alex Guy
Recorded and mixed by Jason Webley

"My Love Left Me In April"
Music by Jason Webley
Text by Margaret Rucker
Vocals/accordion: Jason Webley
Vocals: Alex, Sarah, Shenandoah, Eliza, Chris, and Zac
Viola/violin: Alex Guy
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Bass: Jherek Bischoff
Drums: Paul Kikuchi
Saxophone: Chris Poage
Ukulele: John Rinaldi
Recorded and mixed by Jason Webley

"Eyes of Margaret"
Words and music by John Morris Rankin
Vocals: Jason, Alex, Sarah, Chris, Eliza, Zac, and Shenandoah
Guitar/piano: Jason Webley
Viola: Alex Guy
Cello: Maria Scherer Wilson
Bass: Jherek Bischoff
Drums: Paul Kikuchi
Recorded and mixed by Jason Webley

Mastered by Jason Webley
Bass parts recorded by Luke Cincotta at Sing Sing Studios, Melbourne
Produced by Jason Webley

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"Pyramid" and "My Love Left Me In April" © 2014 by Jason Webley, Music That Tears Itself Apart (SESAC).
"Eyes of Margaret" © 1995 by John Morris Rankin, Ole Sound Productions (SOCAN).

"Patches," "Night," and "Sonnet" by Margaret Rucker first appeared in *University of Washington Poems, Third Series*, published in 1927.
"Spring and Fall" by Gerard Manley Hopkins was written in 1880 and published posthumously in 1918.

All photos from the concert (pgs. 40, 50-69) and cemetery progression (pgs. 83, 86-87) by Lou Daprille.
Images on pages 5-39 were scanned from Margaret Rucker's scrapbook by Jascha Ephraim and digitally restored by Jason Webley.
Archival photos of the Historic Everett Theatre (p. 48), the Rucker Mausoleum (p. 70), and Evergreen Cemetery (pgs. 84-85) courtesy of the Everett Public Library.

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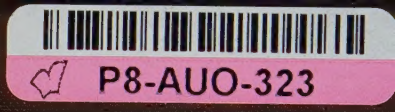
Thank you!

TRACK LIST

1. Jason Webley – *My Love Left Me In April*
2. Eliza Rickman – *Lark of My Heart*
3. Shenandoah Davis – *Spring and Fall*
4. Led to Sea – *Old Haunts*
5. Mts. & Tunnels – *Dear Margaret*
6. Jherek Bischoff – *Night*
7. Shenandoah Davis – *Sonnet*
8. Led to Sea – *Patches*
9. Eliza Rickman – *Maker of My Sorrow*
10. Lonesome Leash – *First Day*
11. Lonesome Leash – *Firefly*
12. Zac Pennington – *Possession Sound*
13. Jason Webley – *Pyramid*
14. Ensemble – *My Love Left Me In April*
15. Ensemble – *Eyes of Margaret*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